11: Cipriani E-3 (1951-1955) 1966 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

attached. From it to the ring run a series of long batons, the 'ribs' of the umbrella. All along the length of the transverse bundle of canes are attached the ends of similar 'ribs', with supplementary canes at weak points. In this hut and in a number of others, extra rings of canes not supported by uprights are put in afterwards for extra strength, all securely lashed at every point.

At this stage of construction the hut would thus have consisted of a centre pole, first circle of uprights supporting the first ring of canes, second (unsupported) ring of canes fixed to the 'ribs' running over it, second concentric circle of uprights supporting the third ring of canes, the fourth (unsupported) ring of canes, and the third circle of uprights supporting the fifth and last ring of canes. Right across from the entrance to the opposite side of the hut ran the elliptical transverse bundle of canes. Tight rush fibre lashings at every crossing and meeting point held the whole frame solidly together.

The roof itself was then put on. This consists of palm leaves like huge fans. The Onges split these in halves down the centre vein and then lay one half on top of the other, head to tail, main ribs together. Four, six or possibly more reeds, three metres long and two to three centimetres in diameter, are then split in half lengthwise and laid out parallel on the ground. The pairs of palm leaves are then laid across the parallels and lashed securely with rush fibres, working from the bottom up, so that the edges of each pair cover the ribs of the pair below, making a water-shed. Seen from the inside of the finished hut the ribs, blackened by smoke, look almost like parallel vaulting.

In this particular hut there are beds for seven families (and their dogs) set as radii, and four transversely. Round the centre pole, on three sides only (leaving the fourth open for access to the central fire) are three fairly high platforms, rather smaller than the beds. Occasionally I saw young people sleeping on two of these, very cramped, climbing up a fixed ladder to reach them. The third platform was always used to keep meat out of the way of the dogs, and is clearly a recent innovation following their arrival in the island. The rough platforms forming the beds proper were about fifty centimetres off the ground, but this distance varies from place to place – in the south, at Beniabol I saw them about one metre off the ground, with the family fire under instead of beside them.